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EARLY CLUB LIFE IN LOS ANGELES

BY JANE E. COLLIER.

(Read before the Friday Morning Club, October 4, 1895, by Miss Jane E. Collier.—Published by permission of the author.)

The Friday Morning Club is scarcely yet old enough to toast itself on its birthdays or banquet itself on anniversaries. Modesty forbids such demonstrations in one so young. But while we are waiting for time to make fast our foundations, strengthen our wavering wills and make clear our purposes, it might not be amiss for us to be also looking about for some reputable ancestors. If we could by searching find out a few club grandmothers who would be a credit to us and upon whose shoulders we might lay at least some of the burdens as well as the honors of our club life it might ease our minds of any fears of a mushroom existence and encourage us to believe that there is in us life eternal. If we can find any trace of having evolved from those early Woman's Clubs of Los Angeles we are entitled to rejoice in the discovery, as one rejoices in finding a long-lost parent. It furnishes us a family tree at once, and having found a branch upon which to hang the Friday Morning Club we can proceed at once to reckon our birthdays and make preparations for mild festivities, befitting one who, having ancestors, is not to be looked upon lightly or frowned down unceremoniously.

We are entitled to claim some kinship, I think, to what was, I believe, the first woman's club of Los Angeles, organized April 13th, 1878, seventeen years ago, in Dr. Lockhart's parlors. Mrs. C. M. Severance was made President; Mrs. B. C. Whiting, Vice-President; and Mrs. M. D. Spalding, Secretary and Treasurer. All three of these ladies are at present officers of the Friday Morning Club. The Treasurer's book shows a membership of twenty-five at the beginning. Many of the names may also be found on the books of the Friday Morning Club. Among them are: M. Seymour, Mrs. S. D. Furrey, Mrs. C. B. Jones, Miss Pigne (now Mrs. Wood), Miss Brousseau, Mrs. M. C. Graham and Miss Collier.

What this Woman's Club was for and what it was going to do were as vital questions then as they are now in reference to our own

club. It was accused of being progressive, and there was a suspicion at least in the "legal male mind" that its members might at any moment adopt bloomers as a club costume. Yet the constitution and by-laws were inoffensively feminine and conservative, there being no hint in them of that deadly reformatory spirit that is so ruinous to the peace and stagnation of society in general. The constitution simply recited that "the object of this association shall be, primarily, to become an organized social center for united thought and action, and, ultimately, to furnish a central resting place for the convenience of its members."

The first meetings were held in the parlor of Union Hall, which was on Spring street nearly opposite the old Court House site. The place of meeting was at that time considered a trifle suburban. I remember that I entered the club hall for the first time with considerable fear and trembling as it was my first acquaintance with a certain "eminent woman of our age" except as I had known her through the pages of a bulky green book in my mother's library: Mrs. C. M. Severance. She was the central figure and moving spirit in those early club days. From her many of us got our first ideas of what club life ought to be and might be. If we have not yet reached either her ideal or our own we trust that we are at least in the morning of realization, and that the full light of success may soon break upon us. The club work of those early days did not vary materially from the work of today, though our numbers were small and our programmes did not materialize with unvarying certainty.

I believe the first paper I heard read in that club was one by Mrs. Chapin on "The Importance of Protecting Home Industries." The Southern California Fruit Packing Company was then just struggling into existence and the writer urged us to take it under our fostering care. I doubt not that it owes its present prosperity to our timely interest.

Mrs. Whiting was kinder to us then than she is now, and read papers to us on the importance of cultivating a love of agricultural pursuits: Industrial Education, in fact. But that was before Mrs. Wills had deserted art and taken to work of which we will speak later. We have reason to congratulate ourselves that labor has always had able advocates among us.

And I remember that Miss Stevens gave us a paper on dress reform with practical illustrations. She had evolved some sort of a Greek gown from her classical brain and, producing this wonderful creation, she subjugated Miss Seymour into a dummy upon which

to display its charms. It was supposed to be less objectionable than the short skirts, the bicycle not having yet appeared as a reason for their existence, and, of course, the mere matter of health and convenience counted for nothing in their favor. It was not until pleasure demanded them that they dared to appear upon our streets. But let us not lose heart though a reform in street dress is brought about by love of a pastime rather than by force of common sense; at least the result is good; let us clasp that fast to our fainting hearts and be comforted. Miss Stevens bent her energies toward compromise, but today proves that it was a bicycle and not compromise that was needed.

One of the reformatory measures undertaken by the Woman's Club of '78 was an attempt to have a competent, and in every way desirable woman made librarian of the city library. Miss Pigne, now Mrs. Wood, was our candidate. We went in full force, twenty in all, before the honorable body having the power to make the appointment, with our petition. They listened to us in respectful silence and then requested us to retire, which we did, gracefully, of course. They then promptly elected Pat Connolly librarian, as previously "fixed." While we could not approve of the appointment we took what cold comfort we might in an approving conscience and continued our fight as we have done to this day without effective ammunition, which is the ballot. We may not always use it when once it is granted, but I think we will occasionally be able to bring down some game with it. Some advance has certainly been made in our city library, however, since the reign of Mr. Connolly, fifteen years ago, for since that time its work has been confided to the care of capable women who, we hope, may continue to administer it with satisfaction to the public and credit to themselves.

Perhaps one of the most noteworthy social events in our early club life occurred January 9th, 1879, in Union Hall. On that occasion the club members gave a dramatic burlesque of their meetings. The burlesque was written by one of the most talented members, Miss Stevens, now a teacher in Oakland. The club was at that time divided into four sections: art, education, work and discussion, with an occasional fifth day for recreation. Each section was most royally travestied. In the old programme which I have before me the names of those who took part are so skillfully disguised that I am thrown back upon my memory to recall them: Mrs. Bradfield, Mrs. Spalding, Mrs. Chloe B. Jones, Miss Seymour, Mrs. M. C. Graham and Miss Collier occur to me. If the audience took the

travesty seriously the fault could not have been due to the acting, though, strange to say, none of these ladies have since attained to any eminence in dramatic art.

This pioneer club must have had frequent leanings toward things in "lighter vein," for in addition to its efforts in the dramatic art I find in searching through old club manuscript that they once perpetrated the startling innovation of electing a man to associate membership. The gentleman was Mr. C. W. Gibson, and the honor was doubtless conferred for love and affection: qualities rare in men toward women's clubs. The paper conferring the degree has fallen into my hands and reads as follows:

"To whom it may concern: This is to certify that Mr. C. W. Gibson has been examined as to his genealogical, physiological, psychological and phrenological character and found worthy, and as there is a presumption that equal satisfaction would follow the investigation of his biology, osteology, neurology, plutocracy and representative democracy:—we, the ladies of the Woman's Club of Los Angeles, have, "in full conclave, unanimously, *in maxima concordia*, and full regalia, elected him by our most sacred rites of *hic, haec, hoc; hocus, pocus, locus; and sum, es, est*, to membership associate of the most ancient and honorable body, known in history as the Woman's Club of Los Angeles, and we call upon the thirty-two points of the compass, the zenith and nadir, and the universe in general, to recognize said Mr. C. W. Gibson as entitled to all the honors and privileges of our society. In proof of genuineness we append our seal. Mrs. Lucy Jenkins, President. Mrs. Baxter, Secretary."

Alas! there is no record of the Friday Morning Club ever having admitted men as associate members, but we offer as excuse for this neglect the same one that they offer for not granting us the ballot: "They do not want it."

I have not been so fortunate as to find the minutes of those early meetings in '79 and '80 and have therefore had to fall back upon my treacherous memory for many of these incidents, but there are doubtless a number of ladies here this morning who can recall many things of interest that I have omitted.

It is certain that the Friday Morning Club has in it some of the same blood that flowed in the veins of that early Woman's Club, and is entitled to claim relationship with it. So far as the books show which I have access to, this venerable club grandmother must have died somewhere in 1880. Death was probably caused by Mrs. C. M. Severance going east; that was a chock that early club life was scarcely strong enough to resist.

From 1880 to 1885 there seems to have been a break in club life in Los Angeles. At least I have failed to secure any records of that time, but a revival seems to have taken place on January 8th, 1885. On that date thirty ladies met in Bryson's hall to discuss organization. Dr. Fay, who was always an advance guard when a liberal movement was on foot, led the meeting, and with the masculine element to give them a start, the ladies once more set forth on permanent organization.

The object as stated in article 2 of the constitution is: "the intellectual and social improvement of its members, and any kindred work approved by the club. The President was Mrs. C. M. Severance; Vice-Presidents—Mrs. M. C. Graham, Mrs. S. C. Hubbell, Mrs. H. M. Ross; Treasurer, Mrs. E. M. Willard; Secretary, Mrs. C. W. Gibson; Board—Mesdames Frank Gibson, D. G. Stephens, F. C. Howes, Pigne, Bath, and Wills. This club grandmother seems to have had an excellent constitution and great vitality, as she entered at once upon a successful career.

The club first turned its thoughts toward an exhibit of woman's work at the world's fair at New Orleans, but after hearing a report from their committee, Mrs. D. G. Stephens and Mrs. Hagan, they withdrew suddenly, appalled at the discouragements.

The first formal address before this club was made by Mrs. Jeanne Carr on "Women in Business," and was full of interest. Miss Clark and Miss Macy kept them informed on kindergartens. But the chief interest doubtless centered around the Art Committee, of which Miss Willis was chairman, and her paper on Michael Angelo, illustrated by a large collection of photographs, must have been a treat indeed. This of course was before Mrs. Wills had deserted art and taken to cooking schools and work, but these things show that the world moves, and doubtless cooking will become an art if artistic people take hold of it.

The Flower Festival Home, which is one of the most creditable and successful institutions of our city, had in a measure its origin in this woman's club of 1885. The work section, consisting of Mrs. D. G. Stephens, Mrs. Booth and Mrs. Howes, announced as their subject for March 7th, 1885, the "Condition and wages of working women of Los Angeles." Committees were appointed to inquire into the subject and report on that date. Mrs. Stephens and Mrs. Frank Gibson investigated the matter thoroughly and reported that the most urgent need was for a well-conducted, inexpensive family boarding-house, a home where young women on small salaries could have the comforts and protection of a home at slight expense. Con-

siderable enthusiasm was aroused, and the ladies, Mrs. Gibson and Mrs. Stephens—we all know of what stuff they are made—having once taken up a cause were not disposed to desert it hastily. The subject was continued for several meetings and finally culminated in Flower Festival being given to raise funds toward establishing a home for working girls. Its success was beyond all expectation, and as the enthusiasm grew and the work increased a separate society was formed under the name of the "Flower Festival Society," making the Home their special work. The new society drew largely from the working element of the Woman's Club, but they could not have been enlisted in a better cause. And it seems to me that in no way can a woman's club better fulfill its mission than as a center from which collective thought crystallizes into individual action. If our club life succeeds in suggesting to any of us a field for efficient individual work it certainly has not been in vain. But effective work to be done by a society must be specific, must be clearly defined. It cannot be effectively done by forming a society and selecting the work afterward. The society must be formed for the work—not the work for the society. Such was the method of the Flower Festival Society, and its work has long since ceased to be an experiment, it has become history. You all know it, or may know it if you are interested to look it up.

One other thing inaugurated by this club and successfully carried out was the nomination and election of Mrs. Anna S. Averill as a member of the School Board of Los Angeles in November, 1886. The work was done almost entirely through the primaries. A committee of ladies, three in number, called upon the leading politicians of each party and asked them to present Mrs. Averill's name for nomination. The gentlemen took hold of the matter not only cheerfully but with enthusiasm and carried it forward to success without it being necessary for the women to patrol even the outskirts of the political campaign.

These are only a few of the many things our club grandmothers busied themselves about, and as I look through the records of their deeds and misdeeds I am struck with the courage of their convictions and am surprised that Los Angeles does not come nearer being a model city when we consider all their efforts in her behalf.

This club grandmother, born January 8th, 1885, lived until May 5th, 1888. She seems to have expired on that date in the middle of a sentence, evidently from exhaustion brought on by too violent work at a flower festival.

And so passed away two loved and honored societies, but their

works do follow them, and from their ashes has sprung the Friday Morning Club, fully armed for battle when a principle is involved, but loving peace more than war, yet ever ready to extend the hand of fellowship to earnest effort in any good cause. But the world moves only so fast as the individual moves, and if we each push on a little every year to better thinking, we will have made our largest contribution to the world's betterment; for it is what we make of ourselves rather than what we make others do that counts for real growth. And if the Friday Morning Club makes three hundred women thoughtful, fair minded, joyous, loving justice as well as mercy, it has done a work of which it need not feel ashamed.